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An Interview with Defend Job Philippines

Mindsetbreaker Press

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Can you tell us any background how Defend Job Philippines started? What specific activities you do in Defend Job Philippines? Does Defend Job a grassroots organization? What is the structure of the group? How do you sustain your organization economically in terms of campaigns and projects?

Defend Job Philippines was created by women workers of Triumph international who were victims of illegal and unjust lay off on June 2009. The workers established Defend Job as a workers center helping workers victims of the global crisis. As a campaign center DJP organize workers and also networks with unions and other organizations. Our organization has a board of directors. The donations from the workers and organizations embracing the campaigns for jobs and justice are used for our campaigns.

I've heard that you support worker struggles most especially in the Philippines, how does it looks like? Do you have any aims or goals that you want to achieve? What are they? Do you also build networks with other workers struggles

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in other places in the Philippines? What specific trade that workers do and what company they are connected with? Does support from Defend Job limited only for employed folks or not at all?

We support workers struggle such as those who are victims of dismissal and other unfair labor practices of companies; contractualization, low wages and the attacks on the right to organize. Our aim to contribute in terms of campaigning workers issues affected by the global crisis. To educate people about how big multi national corporations and the government is passing the brunt of the crisis to the working people by implementing flexible labor policies such as contractualization and outsourcing. Because Defend Job is a campaign center for jobs, our stress is the issue of joblessness, its roots—we do not have our own industries to absorb the millions of our labor force and farmers also do not have their own lands resulting them to be landless and displaced.

Does the group was formed in connection with Triumph case? How does Defend Job find out about the case? What exactly happened with the Triumph case? Is it true that there are working people in Triumph being kicked out or dismissed by the company? When and why this happen?

We filed a legal case against Triumph International at the National Labor Relations Commission because Triumph dismissed 1663 workers on June 2009 when the company abruptly closed its two factories in Taguig City. The closure is unjust, the Labor Code said that there should be 30 days notice prior to termination of employment or closure but the company already closed the factory when they announced the closure. The closure aims to bust the union of Triumph workers which is Bagong Pagkakaisa ng mga Manggagawa sa Triumph International. The union fought for 34 years for the rights and welfare of the workers and the company want to get rid of our union because they want to take away all our hard won victories for the welfare of the workers such as wages, benefits and regularization of contractual workers.

How many workers being dismissed? What are the workers responses after being dismissed? How the workers lived after being kicked out? Do the workers set demands from the company after dismissal? What kind of economic alternative being made by workers after they were dismissed? I was informed about the cooperative being organized by dismissed workers with Defend Job in the midst of their struggle; could you please tell us more about these?

1663 were dismissed from work. We formed a picket line in front of the company to denounce the illegal and unjust closure and dismissal because it is not true that the company is incurring losses. We stand firm that the closure is anti-worker, unjust and inhumane because: The company is not losing its business. In fact, Triumph International boasts in their official website the total revenue of \$1.6 billion annually. It is still the number one lingerie company in the world. In the Philippines, the company sold P1.2 billion worth of underwear products in 2007 and the company's asset grows from P189.8 million in 1989 to P745 million in 2007. Despite company's open declaration of closure, the management still operates its Sales and Marketing Department, maintained 142 personnel and will also hire another 128 personnel. As a matter of fact, the company filed retrenchment and not permanent closure as their main reason at the Department of Labor and Employment. Mr. Dieter Streicher, Managing Director of Triumph International Philippines also said that they are looking forward for future investments in the Philippines. We stand firm that Triumph International should stop in worsening the miserable condition of the workers. The Global Restructuring Program must not result in the massive retrenchment and displacement of workers and their families not only in the Philippines but to other production centers worldwide. 2. We demand for the unconditional reinstatement and re-hiring of workers of Triumph International Philippines and Star Performance Incorporated. In addition, moving out of materials and equipment of Triumph International Philippines should

be stopped. 3. We demand to Triumph International for unemployment pay of wages, salaries and benefits of the retrenched workers until such time that the dispute has not been settled, workers considered back to work or reinstatement of workers has not been made by Triumph International. 4. We denounce the Philippine Government in conniving with the German Multi-National instead of safeguarding the rights of the Filipino workers to job security. The government should take decisive action for the benefit of the workers. 5. STOP the harassment and repression to us by Triumph International, Philippine Government and the government controlled Food Terminal incorporated police forces.

We established our own garment workers cooperative as an expression of our struggle for livelihood and social justice. Displaced workers are the members of the cooperative. We are making solidarity bags for their activities and they are paying us decent pay for our work. It is a product of hardwork of every displaced worker of Triumph International who are unwaveringly fighting against injustices committed by the German-Swiss lingerie company. It symbolizes the courage and wisdom of the Triumph International workers. Patronizing our solidarity collections is supporting the fight of the Triumph workers to defend job and opposing the policy of the capitalist to pass the brunt of the crisis to the workers in the midst of the global crisis and also means feeding the worker's families and children who are also directly displaced due to the massive lay-off.

What kind of relationship does the Triumph Company upholds among their workers since then? Does working conditions behind Triumph have any subtle and dramatic changes? If so, what are they?

Our Union has been around for thirty two years since Triumph operates its business on March 1975, and since then management of Triumph never stopped in busting our Union in different manner and forms as we unwaveringly fight for better working condition inside the factory. We experienced quite a number of bloody

Right now, the legal case in the level of the National Labor Relations Commission. On August 2011, the case was being dismissed by the said Commission in favor of Triumph International. We filed a Motion for Reconsideration and still waiting for the response and will pursue our case to the Court of Appeals.

What can you say about workers self-management means no bosses, as an alternative example like in Argentina last 2001? Is it possible here in the Philippines that worker take control of the means of production and distribution? And not always depend their job and lives to the capitalist/company/corporations?

We have a good relationship with No Chains in Argentina. They are two self manage cooperatives of workers initiated by La Alameda in Argentina and now with Dignity of Returns in Thailand and we are working to learn from them and from our own experience as well to develop such kind of workers collective.

Ok finally, there might be people who maybe interested to support and help you out with your struggle along the way or extend solidarity with you most especially with dismissed workers in struggle, what kind of support you need or how could they help you?

Thank you for supporting the Triumph workers struggle and also our struggle for jobs and justice. We are encouraging you to write letter of appeals to NLRC. We are also inviting you to join us in our actions not only for Triumph workers but to all people and workers affected by the destructive effects of the global crisis. Please share to the world the stories of our struggle and solidarity. You can also patronize the solidarity collections that our workers collective or cooperative are producing such as bags and other items.

Thank you very much. Any last words

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dispersal in the picket line on our 6 times of strikes. Even the government connive with them because Triumph management hired hundreds of policemen to dragged the strikers and throw them in the police truck. We were bombed with water cannons, two (2) officers were handcuffed and one of them is a pregnant woman hanged and dragged by the mobile patrol because her hand was tied up on another woman inside that mobile. In that incident three (3) of our officers were detained in the municipal jail including this pregnant woman. There are total 25 Union leaders dismissed for the reason of merely organizing and educating our members and exercising our rights to collectively bargain and right to mass action and or strike. On 1985 475 active union members were also laid off by Triumph management. And now these worst things happened to us and our family, because they wanted to pass the brunt of crisis to us, workers who spent our whole life to make the company grow and prosper.

What kind of conditions do people inherit while working for Triumph? Do divisions occur among fellow workers who are working there? If so, what are the root causes of these? Do workers have been given a chance to improve conditions while being at work? Could the workers able to get their demands from the company? What mostly are these demands, if any?

Our first collective action happened on 1976 when workers demand for proper ventilation inside the factory. It is one of our victorious actions that strengthened our union and demand for a Collective Bargaining Agreement with the company where we demand for increase in salaries and wages, benefits, regularization, safe and healthy working condition, funds for workers education and welfare programs and other legitimate demands. To improve our working condition is by means of collectively asserting and fighting for our rights led by our union. The company will not give it to us unless we will fight.

Do the workers organize themselves independently after being dismissed? Or there were outside organizations that extend support with them later on? If so, how they were able to get in contact with these outside organizations? Do the workers had able to reach contacts with outside groups since then or have experienced in the past? Is there a worker organization like union or something that was being formed?

After the dismissal, our union led the collective actions including the campaigns. Workers organized different forms of actions such as forum on the globalization and fighting against it, symbolic protest, mobilization in front of Triumph Office, Department of Labor and Employment and Malacanang Palace. We also had solidarity actions with Triumph workers in Thailand and other countries and conducted internationally coordinated actions. Solidarity organizations from outside are organizations, unions and groups we worked since we are working inside the company. We are helping each other to achieve common good for the workers interest and welfare. When the mass retrenchment happened to us, Triumph workers initiated to form a campaign center that will unite different unions, people's organizations, institutions and other sectors to fight for jobs and justice in the midst of the global crisis. Since then, Defend Job Philippines is embraced by many workers and other sectors.

I've heard about the militant actions such as pickets/ strikes as protest being taken by dismissed workers with Defend Job fighting back against Triumph, how does it happen? When did it start? Can you please tell us more about these? Does such actions still happening nowadays? Are these actions on a legal basis?

Strike is a strong, courageous and sharp collective weapon of workers to demand for our rights and welfare and contributes for the fundamental changes of our society. At Triumph, it started on June 2009 after the company abruptly shut down the factory. We set up a picketline at the vicinity of the factory to guard the mas-

sive relocation of machines and raw materials out from the factory. Workers and our families sleep in the picketline. While we are on guard, various activities are happening in the picketline; educational discussion on different Issues affecting the workers, mass meetings, symbolic protest and solidarity evenings. We experienced many strong typhoons in the picketline while on strike and also violent dispersals led by goons, security guards and police inside the industrial complex. These actions are happening nowadays especially that workers rights are under attack. Workers are push to collectively act and to strike because of the inhumane and unjust working and living condition inside and outside the factory.

Can you please give us any profile information or any backgrounds about Triumph Company? Where they are originally base from? In what places in the Philippines they operate? What they do and what are their products?

Triumph International is an international underwear manufacturer. Founded in Heubach, Württemberg, Germany 1886 by the two families Spiesshofer & Braun. The first foreign subsidiary was established in Zurzach, Switzerland which has become the company's headquarters. The multinational manufacturing and marketing organization operates in 120 countries around the world. It is one of the leading underwear producers in the world and in 2010 had an annual turnover of 2.2 billion Swiss Franks, and over 36,500 employees. In the Philippines, they have two factories in Taguig; Triumph International Philippines Incorporated and Star Performance Incorporated where elegant and expensive underwear for export to Europe are being made.

What is the current status of the Triumph case at the moment? Is it still ongoing? What sort of actions being carried out by Defend Job and by the workers themselves presently? Do the workers who have been kicked out still want to go back working for Triumph, especially when workers demands will be given by the company in the end? Or this logic isn't possible at all?